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THE 300TH INDYPENDENT 25

#300 JANUARY 2026

DAVID HOLLENBACH

EVICT THE LANDLORD

TENANTS OF ONE OF NYC'S BIGGEST SLUMLORDS ARE URGING THE CITY TO SEIZE THEIR BUILDINGS

BY ELSIE CARSON-HOLT — PAGE 6

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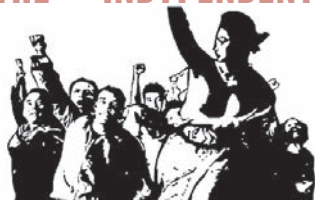
300 ISSUES
THE INDYPENDENT



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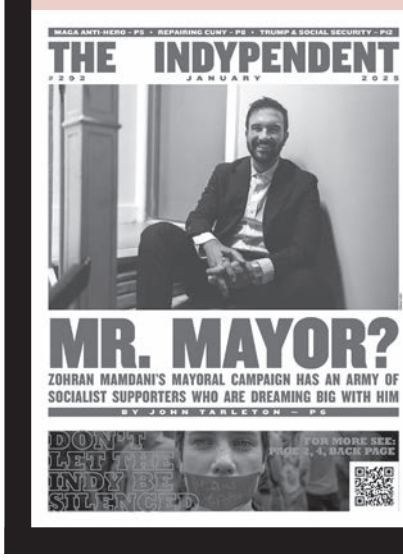
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MR. MAYOR?
ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S MAYORAL CAMPAIGN HAS AN ARMY OF SOCIALIST SUPPORTERS WHO ARE DREAMING BIG WITH HIM
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A TIME LIKE NO OTHER

It was a windswept, bitterly cold Saturday afternoon in December when more than 50 people gathered in front of the Brooklyn Museum. It was the first day of door-to-door canvassing for Zohran Mamdani's upstart mayoral campaign. We were barely a month past Donald Trump's devastating re-election victory and another dispiriting failure by the Democratic Party establishment. It was hard not to be a doomer.

When asked why they had come out, one volunteer replied, "I want to be in favor of something for once." Another added, "I want to feel something again."

We followed a pair of canvassers as they made their way up and down six-floor apartment buildings, knocking on 51 doors in three hours, getting one firm commitment plus several tenants who were intrigued by his rent freeze proposal. History was starting to be made.

Zohran was running at 1–2% in the polls, but we put him on the cover anyway with the provocative headline of "Mr. Mayor?" and observed that his campaign platform — rent freeze, fast and free buses, free universal child care — was popularizing socialism as a commonsense solution to the high cost of living.

We also noted Mamdani had a socialist movement coalescing behind him that had been running and winning tough races against the entrenched status quo politicians for almost a decade. For many Indy *readers, our cover story would be the first time they heard about the Mamdani campaign. By June, the same political and media establishment that had proclaimed Andrew Cuomo the inevitable frontrunner started to realize the ground was shifting beneath their feet.*

■ ■ ■

STARTING JANUARY 1, *a socialist will be running the largest and most influential city in the country while a would-be dictator continues consolidating power in Washington. The eyes of the world will be on New York. It will be a moment filled with possibilities and fraught with peril. And, it will be the biggest story we've ever covered. For us, the sheer number of angles to explore are staggering. Grassroots movements of tenants, workers, immigrants, climate justice activists and many others will try to seize the moment to try and win transformative changes that were previously impossible. We're here for it.*

With the Left ascendant in the largest and most influential city in the United States, we're looking to do more in 2026 – more coverage in print and online, more editions of the paper, more copies printed and distributed, more podcasts and live events.

And we need your help. Our goal is to raise $50,000 in our winter fund drive, more than we've ever asked for before. Reaching our goal will give us the financial runway we need to take off and soar.

We live in a moment when oligarchs such as Larry Ellison (CBS, MTV, Paramount Studios, Tik-Tok), Elon Musk (Twitter/X), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) and Jeff Bezos (Washington Post) are building media empires. In contrast, The Indy *functions as a public commons that runs on broadly socialist values. We do the work throughout the year — publishing this newspaper, updating our website regularly between issues, hosting a weekly Tuesday 5–6pm radio show on WBAI-99.5 FM — and we share it all freely. Under capitalism, that doesn't make any sense. So call us crazy, but we trust that enough readers who share our values will contribute when we ask for support.*

Will you be one of those readers? If you have given in the past, thank you. If you can give again this year and even dig a little deeper, we will be so grateful. If you haven't given before, this is an incredible time to join the extended community of Indy *supporters and make your first contribution.*

Thank you from all of us for your support.

Onward,

John Tarleton

John Tarleton
INDYPENDENT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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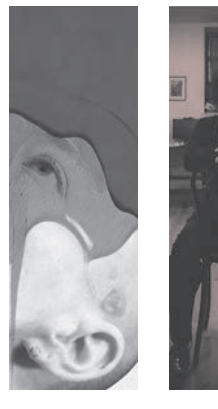

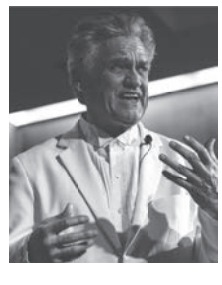

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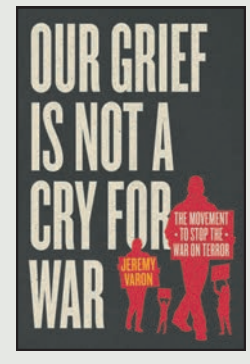

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NYC'S BUST

WHAT HISTORY CAN TEACH ZOHRAN ABOUT CREATING BROAD-BASED PROSPERITY

By Theodore Hamm

In *The Menace of Prosperity*, Daniel Wortel-London offers a timely and engaging analysis of three distinct periods of fiscal crisis in New York City — the 1870s, 1930s, and 1970s. Wortel-London explores how different groups diagnosed the city's economic troubles in each period and what lessons their remedies hold for present-day activists and policymakers. He argues that public subsidies on behalf of elite-driven growth repeatedly spurred economic collapse in Gotham — a dynamic that Zohran Mamdani and progressives literally cannot afford to repeat.

Here is *The Indypendent*'s recent conversation with the author.

Give us a brief overview of the three periods you cover.

In the 1870s, one in five American cities went bankrupt, and many New Yorkers blamed the crisis on public subsidies to private real-estate developers. Organizations such as the Knights of Labor responded by demanding worker-owned cooperatives and publicly owned enterprises to democratize and stabilize urban growth. By the early 20th century, however, a new cohort of urban liberals argued that taxing speculative development — not replacing it — was the key to a healthy city. This approach became deeply embedded in modern urban policy.

The Great Depression revived these debates. Reformers like Catherine Bauer and Lewis Mumford championed public housing and long-range planning as tools for stabilizing land markets and municipal finances. Yet by the 1940 federal programs on behalf of powerful real-estate interests helped sidelined this vision. The boosterism of earlier decades survived the downturn bruised but intact.

In the postwar period, liberal policymakers paired corporate-centered growth strategies with redistributive welfare programs. When the fiscal crisis of the 1970s hit, these same leaders chose to retrench the city's social welfare apparatus rather than its corporate subsidies. And while contemporary debates still revolve around whether the wealthy should be taxed more heavily, largely forgotten are earlier critiques that saw the city's fiscal instability as a product of elite economic power itself.

Many people know Henry George primarily as a labor radical who lost the 1886 mayoral race. But as you show, his ideas shaped New York's political economy well into the 20th century. Tell us about his work.

George argued that rising land values — maintained by speculative landlords — harmed local finances and undermined productive enterprise. High land prices drove manufacturers and commercial firms out of the city. When land did sell, landlords claimed the "unearned increment," a rent windfall that cut into the income of both workers and capitalists. Speculation also fueled boom-and-bust cycles that destabilized local institutions and households. George insisted that taxing away this increment would lower land prices, attract productive firms, and create a more stable and equitable urban economy.

His ideas appealed across class lines: artisans dealing with unemployment and wage cuts, manufacturers upset about high taxes and land costs, homeowners seeking relief, officials looking for steady revenue, and professional economists appalled by the inefficiencies

IF I COULD CHANGE THE COURSE OF THAT GOLDEN STREAM, I COULD TAKE THE CITY OUT OF HOCK!
GAS PROFITS
ELECTRIC LIGHT PROFITS
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FRANCHISE PROFITS
FOR SALE
PRIVATE INTERESTS
FATHER "KNICK"
I'M BROKE TOO!

Reproduced from Klein's Weekly News, July 26, 1913

KLEIN'S WEEKLY

S BOOM & ECONOMY

of speculative land markets. Their efforts culminated in the appointment of Lawson Purdy — a committed Georgist — as president of the city's Tax Department, where he significantly increased taxes on land.

But Purdy and later Georgists reinterpreted George. Rather than lowering land values, they aimed to raise them — and then tax the gains to fund public purposes. Purdy's support for debt-financed subway expansion and the pioneering 1916 zoning code sought, in his words, to "arrange streets and public places that privately owned land may be put to its best use." These policies expanded the city but also helped set the stage for the speculative bubble that fueled the city's 1930s-era fiscal crisis.

Tell us a bit about how the city catered to white-collar industries in the mid-20th century. Was that an "inevitable" shift?

It was far from inevitable. In 1944, blue-collar workers made up 60% of the metropolitan workforce and nearly half of the city's labor force. Some officials recognized this importance. A 1937 industrial survey commissioned by the city comptroller warned that "we cannot take our continued industrial power for granted" and urged the creation of an agency devoted to retaining and attracting manufacturers.

Most leaders, however, were — as labor historian Joshua Freeman noted — "sanguine" about the loss of industrial jobs. A 1956 New York Area Research Council report concluded that city agencies had "not been sufficiently sympathetic to and conscious of manufacturing as a vital force." Instead, New York doubled down on attracting white-collar firms. Policymakers assumed that office industries generated higher taxable incomes and represented the "highest and best use" of urban land. Even at the height of the welfare state, urban economists focused on making the city hospitable to corporations through zoning, assessment policies, and urban renewal. As one planner put it, white-collar workers could not be expected to "wade through the filth and insecurity" of "obsolete" industrial neighborhoods.

By the 1970s, the limits of this strategy became painfully clear. The growth of New York's welfare state couldn't compensate for the loss of well-paying entry-level manufacturing jobs that had been sacrificed for Gotham's white-collar economy. The costs of poverty and unemployment were then shunted onto the city's welfare state, burdening public finance. The lesson is clear: to establish both fiscal stability and economic justice, we need an economy that provides for people the first time around.

Jane Jacobs is best-known for challenging Robert Moses' car-centric blueprint. Can you explain how she also critiqued corporate hegemony?

For Jacobs, a healthy urban economy was defined less by the wealth of individual firms than by the collective innovation generated through dense networks of small enterprises. Economic vitality grew from diversity — not economies of scale, but economies of collaboration. Cities should therefore nurture a varied ecosystem of small and medium-sized firms rather than chase large corporations.

Her emphasis on diversity extended to income. A citywide push for uniformly high land values, she argued, would drive out low-equity firms and low-income residents and immigrants whose contributions were essential to urban innovation. Policies that produced "premium land and building prices" promoted what she called "Cataclysmic Money": the self-destruction of economic diversity.

Instead, Jacobs believed that cities needed a mosaic of high- and low-rent spaces to sustain broad participation in the urban economy. Social mobility should come not from replacing working-class residents with middle-class newcomers but from enabling existing residents to move up. As she stated, urban economic development occurs not through the "replacement of the old slum population by a new and different middle-class population," she argued, but through "the old population moving into the middle class."

At its best, Jacobs's framework offered a powerful critique of postwar corporate-centric development. As one reviewer put it, she suggested that "the men making machine parts in their little shops have been and will be more responsible for city growth … than the tycoons and conglomerates." Yet Jacobs's deep suspicion of planning constrained the translation of her ideas into policy. Her largely white, professional followers often protected their own neighborhoods from disruptive development without challenging the broader corporate transformation of the city. By the late 1960s, they preserved their brownstones but not a more egalitarian political economy.

You mention a number of leftist critics of the Wall Street-led response to the fiscal crisis of 1975. Did the Left offer viable alternative remedies?

We often interpret the 1975 fiscal crisis as the result of either an overgenerous welfare state or macroeconomic shifts beyond local control. But critics at the time highlighted the corporate welfare state as a major source of vulnerability.

Corporate firms, oriented toward national and global markets, could leave the city at any opportunity — which many did in the early 1970s. Those that stayed were exposed to global financial swings, making the city's revenues volatile. Large portions of municipal debt financed corporate subsidies rather than public services. Economist William K. Tabb noted that New York's "capital budget debt … owes far more to the banker-real estate developer agencies than it does to helping the poor." Even high welfare costs, critics argued, reflected private-sector power: low wages, high rents, and disinvestment produced the very social needs the city was blamed for funding.

Yet while fiscal radicals rejected liberal growth strategies, they struggled to articulate feasible alternatives. Their constituency was smaller than in earlier eras; the sunk costs of prior development patterns obscured the true social costs of the white-collar economy; and many radicals doubted that local governments could — or should — pursue alternative growth models at all. As one critic lamented in 1976, "the left … did not step in to fill the void."

Still, several proposals pointed in promising directions: worker cooperatives, industrial planning akin to the Greater London Council's efforts in the 1980s, and public banks. A public bank could redirect the city's $100 billion in deposits away from extractive financial institutions and toward productive, democratically governed investments. Most important, these measures would expose the hidden burdens of the corporate-centered model and open political space for alternatives.

Your work ends with the ascent of the FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) economy. What are the challenges that sector faces today? How might the Mamdani administration help chart a new direction?

Many of the weaknesses of New York's 1970s-era FIRE strategy persist today, but with a new twist: AI. The share of New Yorkers employed in finance has already fallen — from 11.5% in 1990 to 7.7% today — and automation threatens to accelerate this decline. Wealthy individuals continue to live in New York, but wealthy employers are increasingly leaving — not because of taxes, but because the structure of white-collar work is changing. Given the city's heavy reliance on high-income taxes, this poses a serious challenge to the progressive agenda Mamdani champions.

At present, Mamdani's platform focuses mainly on taxing the rich rather than transforming the city's underlying economic base. This makes sense politically, but New York's history suggests the danger of funding progressive goals on a regressive economic foundation. Zohran's long-term success will require reducing the political and fiscal dominance of the wealthy through public banking, progressive procurement, community land trusts, and worker-owned cooperatives — in tandem with tax reform.

There are promising signs here. Mamdani's transition committees include leaders in the solidarity-economy movement, such as Gianpaolo Baiocchi and the president of the New Economy Coalition, and is headed by anti-trust leader Lina Khan. As an assemblymember, he supported public-bank legislation, and he recently released a homeowner policy memo endorsing CLTs and co-ops.

Above all, Mamdani can help make visible what is usually hidden: the enormous public costs of New York's corporate-oriented development model. Unlike the social welfare state, the corporate welfare state is largely invisible. Little attention is paid to the subsidies behind projects like Hudson Yards, the debt service they require, and the way an economy built for the 1% raises costs and renders the city unaffordable for everyone else. By exposing these dynamics, Mamdani can build the political constituency needed to support a more democratic, affordable, and resilient New York City economy.

HISTORIAN:
Daniel Wortel-London is the author of The Menace of Prosperity: New York City And The Struggle for Economic Development, 1865-1981.

OLIGARCHY:
Super-rich New Yorkers have long benefitted from public policies skewed in their favor.

BREANNA MAXINE

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BREANNA MAXINE

PINNACL

RENT-STABILIZED TENANTS CALL ON NYC TO SEIZE 93 BUILDINGS FROM BANKRUPT SLUMLORD BEFORE THEY GO TO AUCTION

By Elsie Carson-Holt

Heat and electricity turned off for days, elderly and disabled residents stranded as elevators break down, intimidation by management, ceilings caving in, rampant roach and mice infestations — all this and more is what living in a Pinnacle Group building is like, tenants say.

Pinnacle is a real-estate behemoth headed by Joel Weiner that owns at least 93 residential buildings in New York City. They contain 5,000 rent-stabilized apartments.

And as of November 21, those 5,000 rent-stabilized units are slated to be auctioned off as a part of a bankruptcy agreement Pinnacle has with its lender, Flagstar Bank.

Left behind in these proceedings are the tenants, many of whom say they are tired of the conditions they have been living in, and feel alienated from the process that will decide who receives ownership of their homes.

In the face of such stakes, tenant organizing within Pinnacle buildings has taken off. About 50 tenant associations in multiple boroughs have come together to form Union of Pinnacle Tenants, the city's first cross-borough tenants union.

One of its first actions was a rally outside Brooklyn's federal courthouse on Nov. 20, the night before the auction began. Tenants stood outside, chanting, waving signs, and testifying about what they had gone through in their buildings, urging Judge Davis S. Jones, who is presiding over the bankruptcy auction, to slow down the process, and for the city to protect the tenants.

Vivian Kuo, a real estate agent, was one of the 50 or so tenants and supporters at the rally. She has lived in a Pinnacle-owned building in Harlem for five years.

"93 buildings, owned by Pinnacle, all rent-stabilized are being auctioned off, and the bidding starts tomorrow. We're here to give the message to the judge tonight, as well as other powers in government, that we deserve to have a say in what happens to our homes," she told *The Indypendent*.

Kuo said she has heard from neighbors who had lived there for decades that her building used to be "a really nice place to live" before Pinnacle took over. It wasn't when she moved in.

"Since the beginning, there were problems," Kuo says. "The first year I was there, the elevator was constantly out. It didn't affect me much, because I live on a low floor, but I know that there were elderly in my building and they were having trouble. So I would email management, no response, no response. Then I started having problems in my own apartment: heat not turning on, pests, the stove, oven, and door not working, leaks, things like that."

Sometimes these issues were addressed, she added, but often they weren't.

A Flatbush tenant, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation from Pinnacle, told the *Indypendent* that there had been a sewage backup in the laundry room; the front door was left unlocked for months, leading to people entering and then sleeping in the building; and there were exposed wires that appeared "cut" on upstairs floors.

"It was systematically neglected," the tenant said.

Afua McKinney, who has lived in a Pinnacle building in Flatbush for 22 years, also said that the building had been well-kept for 10-15 years, but in the last five years, neglect has greatly increased. She described a hole in the roof, mouse and cockroach infestations, no hot water, the front door being broken, and collapsing ceilings.

"Being a longtime tenant, I've gotten used to [these conditions]," McKinney said. The Union of Pinnacle Tenants, she said, has "re-energized and reignited us to address these longstanding issues."

Kuo said the elevator being out for eight months is what motivated her and her neighbors to action, specifically citing the death of one of her neighbors during that time.

"I know one tenant whose wife was infirmed, and she couldn't make it up and down the stairs," she said. "And while the elevator was out, she passed away. Was it because of the elevator only? No, she was sick already, but the elevator being out did not help in the last months of her life. It's not right. It's just not right."

Kuo also mentioned their super being unreachable for a month, and the building's front door being broken.

Pinnacle directs tenants to its call center as a hotline for repairs and service requests. McKinney described it as just "not getting you answers."

"There are huge problems the landlord systematically chooses not to address," said Kuo. "The systematic neglect is really an act of theft. In my mind, there was a contractual agreement that if we pay rent, the landlord will provide us certain services to provide stable housing, safe, habitable homes, and it's barely that.

"But we have to pay rent. The minute we don't pay rent, we get evicted. So why? Why? Why does Pinnacle get a way out of this? They get to keep our money. They get to pay their investors. Get out of the loan that they are in debt for. It seems a little rigged and unfair," she said.

In September, Bloomberg reported that "immediately hazardous" housing-code violations in Pinnacle-owned buildings increased fourfold from 2019 to 2024. The outlet noted this

LE PUSHBACK

is twice the rate of similar rent-stabilized buildings. In McKinney's building, there have been 591 HPD Complaints issued since 2012. There are currently 255 open violations, including 90 Class C violations, which HPD describes as "immediately hazardous" violations, such as lack of heat in winter months, mold, or lead paint.

PINNACLE'S FAILED BUSINESS MODEL

Pinnacle owes more than $564 million on the buildings. The bank initiated foreclosure proceedings earlier this year. In May, Weiner filed for bankruptcy for many of the shell companies that are the buildings' technical owners, a practice common in real estate to insulate the actual owners. Pinnacle blames the bankruptcy on inflation, high operating costs, and the landmark 2019 state law that restricts rent increases, particularly those for renovations and on vacant apartments. Weiner and his family also own more than $200 million in bonds in the Israeli market, which as of May had recently fallen to 87% of their face value.

That 2019 law, the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act, struck at the heart of Pinnacle's business model, which was based on buying up rent-stabilized apartment buildings, forcing out long-term tenants through systematic neglect, harassment, and intimidation, and renovating their apartments to rent out at market rate.

That model emerged after the state weakened its rent-stabilization laws in 1997, City Councilmember Harvey Epstein (D-Manhattan), then a tenant representative on the city Rent Guidelines Board, told the Village Voice in 2017. It proliferated during the housing bubble of 2003–08, and was dubbed "predatory equity" because private-equity firms like Pinnacle, Vantage Properties, and Dawney Day bought up hundreds of buildings. Pinnacle purchased buildings containing 20,000 apartments, many in Harlem and Woodside; within two years, the company had filed eviction cases against 5,000 of those tenants.

"Both Pinnacle and the bank Flagstar are complicit because they thought it would be easy to destabilize rent-stabilized apartments and kick people out. It has not been that easy. So they just have left the buildings to go into disrepair," Kuo said.

Pinnacle tenants have been organizing for at least two decades. In 2006, Harlem residents whose building had been purchased by Pinnacle formed Buyers and Renters United to Save Harlem, after residents were harassed and sent eviction notices. Pinnacle settled with those residents in 2011, paying $2.5 million to legal and tenant-rights groups to help current and former tenants make legal claims for damages.

In 2002, when Pinnacle purchased former Mitchell-Lama buildings in the Bronx, it fired much of the staff within days. A class-action suit filed in 2005 charged that it had fired more than 200 superintendents in buildings it had purchased.

"A business model that is based on destabilizing rent stabilized apartments should not be allowed to exist," says Pinnacle Tenants Union organizer Tracey Rosenthal. "A landlord whose business model is based on trapping tenants and uninhabitable conditions and destabilizing apartments should be put out of business. And that has been true for decades."

There's an element of racial injustice too. Kuo estimates that "broad strokes, 50% of the portfolio being auctioned is in Brooklyn, then Manhattan, and then Queens, and finally in the Bronx, predominantly in Black and Brown neighborhoods."

"A lot of my neighbors are Black, Creole — It's Little Caribbean," said Ellie, a graphic designer who has lived in a Pinnacle building in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens for three years. "They are facing more discrimination from the super and the landlord. They were intentionally repairing the white tenants' apartments before the Black tenants. It's kind of like, 'Oh, if we appeal to these white people in the building, then maybe the issues will start going away.'"

Many of the tenants affected "are elderly and have mobility issues," she added.

Rosenthal says the auction might prove detrimental to tenants, because "it's sending them back to the private market to be preyed on by slumlord development companies."

PUT TENANTS IN CONTROL

Tenants and their advocates say there is a better way for these buildings to exist, one that would give tenants, rather than their landlords, agency over their homes. Pinnacle Tenants Union is asking for the auction to be slowed down or paused, so an option for city intervention could be considered.

One possibility is the city's 7A program, in which privately owned buildings that are being neglected by their owners to the point of hazardous conditions can be taken over by court-appointed administrators. But the city rarely uses that program today. As of January 2025, only 26 buildings, with a total of 204 units, were in the program, according to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. That was down from more than 300 buildings in 1981 and 123 in 2003.

UNDER THE CITY'S LITTLE-USED 7A PROGRAM, BADLY NEGLECTED BUILDINGS CAN BE TAKEN FROM THEIR LANDLORDS BY COURT-APPOINTED ADMINISTRATORS.

Rosenthal points out that the city used this kind of model during the collapse of Signature Bank in 2023. "The city developed a strategy of temporarily transferring the buildings to its land bank, Neighborhood Restore, and then gave the buildings more time to pursue alternative ownership pathways and regulatory agreements," she says.

The auction of Signature Bank's rental units was even larger than Flagstar's holdings: as The City reported, it took the Santander Bank, and a partnership led by the Community Preservation Corporation, to "manage loans covering more than 2,000 apartment buildings and 70,000 rent-controlled or rent-stabilized units in every borough but Staten Island."

The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, which is currently in a state Senate committee, could also provide a path for tenant control of Pinnacle buildings.

The Union of Pinnacle Tenants' emergence comes at a time when radical tenant organizing has grown in New York City and across the United States. Here in New York, the Crown Heights Tenant Union (CHTU), formed in 2013, can count helping launch one of the largest rent strikes in city history in 2020 during the pandemic and organizing about 60-70 tenant associations into its larger membership among its victories. The membership and organizers in CHTU greatly overlaps with UPT: it's fair to say the first paved the way for the latter.

Not to mention the incoming mayoral administration is one that is friendly to the plight of tenants, and eager to ease the housing burden. But although Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani ran on a tenant-centered platform, with a rent freeze for rent-stabilized apartments one of the central promises of his campaign, he did not sign onto a letter asking the bankruptcy judge, Flagstar, and Pinnacle, to postpone the auction. Still, one of CHTU's founders, Cea Weaver, was recently placed on his transition team, and it's hard to imagine a municipal administration that would be more sympathetic or aligned with the values of Pinnacle Tenants United.

Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest, who did sign the letter, grew up in a Pinnacle Group building. "When I was young, taking a bath in brown water was normal," she told the Nov. 20 tenant rally. "It's not shameful to call out the disgusting places where we've had to live in, while Pinnacle made billions of dollars. We're going to stand together and end it now."

At the rally, which was also attended by City Councilmember Chi Osse (D-Brooklyn) and Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes (D-Brooklyn), tenants spoke of squalid conditions: pest infestations, ceilings that caved in, unlocked entryways, leaks, and sometimes no heat and electricity. In November, Con Edison suspended electricity services to two of Pinnacle's

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INSIDE A PINNACLE APARTMENT: *How do you get clean in a bathtub like this?*

STILL FIGHTING: *Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest, a former Pinnacle tenant, speaks at a November 20 rally at the Brooklyn Federal Courthouse.*

CAMPAIGN PROMISE: *Zohran Mamdani speaks in April at a protest in support of South Bronx tenants whose building had been seized from a negligent landlord under the city's 7A program.*

WHEN TENANTS UNITE

RESIDENTS AT 567 ST. JOHN'S PLACE SAVOR PARTIAL VICTORIES, DEMAND MORE

CROWN HEIGHTS TENANT UNION

NEIGHBORS: *567 St. John's Place residents began organizing in 2013 and affiliated with the Crown Heights Tenant Union in 2019.*

By Ella Spitz

In 2021, after decades of living in horrible conditions, the tenants of 567 St. John's Place in Brooklyn felt like they had finally won — the city sided with them in court and took control over the building away from their slumlord.

The court granted their petition for the building to be put into the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development's 7A program, in which a court-appointed administrator is in charge of collecting rents and making repairs.

But, three years after winning their case, the tenants are still waiting for their living conditions to improve.

"Anything you can think of, 567 St. John's has experienced it," tenant Evelyn De Leon told the *Indy*. "Uneven floors that make walking dangerous, constant bedbug and rat infestations, collapsing ceilings, damaged outlets, leaking pipes, and apartments without proper stoves or fridges."

The four-story, eight-unit building currently has 477 open violations listed on HPD's online database, including 87 Class C — "immediately hazardous" — violations such as mice infestations, crumbling ceiling plaster, and lead paint.

The building sits half a block west of Franklin Avenue in a rapidly gentrifying part of Crown Heights. The apartments are rent-stabilized, but the tenants' previous landlord, Gerard Tema, had been illegally overcharging them. One tenant, who wished to remain anonymous, moved in five years ago, and said he had been paying $500 more than his legal rent.

It's become a part of the playbook for landlords of rent-stabilized units to push tenants out by letting the building and units fall into disrepair, flipping the units, and then renting them to new tenants at much higher rates.

But these tenants aren't budging.

Residents in seven of the eight apartments began organizing in 2013, after their stairway collapsed and was left unrepaired for six months. The state Department of Homes and Community Renewal lowered their rents to $1 later that year. One tenant, who also wished to remain anonymous, said Tema lied to her, saying the rent had reverted to its original rate, so she paid him thousands of extra dollars in rent.

"I already bought my apartment with that rent," she said.

The tenants became affiliated with the Crown Heights Tenant Union in 2019 and went on a rent strike. They and CHTU, with the support of the Legal Aid Society, filed a 7A case in the winter of 2021.

Article 7A of the state Real Property Actions and Proceedings Law, enacted in 1965, allows private tenants or HPD to ask Housing Court to appoint a city-approved administrator for a building that has conditions "dangerous to the tenants' life, health and safety" for at least five days. The landlord remains the owner, but the building stays in the 7A program until a new buyer comes in or the landlord proves they can maintain it in habitable condition.

After over a year of litigation, the court sided with the tenants and removed Tema from control. The tenants, given a limited list of candidates, selected Nikolaos Leonardos to be administrator for the building in June 2022.

Leonardos received a 7A Financial Assistance (7AFA) loan of $1,053,965 to help him carry out the repairs ordered by the court. Those loans, which are billed to the property, are rare: Only 24 have been issued in the 7A program's history.

Following face-to-face negotiations with Leonardos starting in August 2022, the residents got their illegal rent overcharges rolled back, and got the wheels turning on their renovation demands. But the renovations, which started on the first floor, did not begin until the spring of 2025. They are still unfinished.

One tenant said Leonardos is pressuring them to temporarily move out of their units, claiming that their presence is causing delays in the renovations. But the tenants had struck a deal with the city that no one else should have to temporarily relocate until the first tenant who did so returns.

That tenant, Betty Nazaire, moved from her first-floor apartment to Bushwick in the spring of 2025. She has been unable to return home, as deadlines for finishing the renovations on her unit keep passing.

The tenants said they anticipated these delays and wanted the city to pay compensation for them, but the city refused.

One tenant noted that Leonardos has not communicated with the tenants about construction times, or when the water needs to be turned off for the work.

With the 7AFA loan, the tenants stressed, he has the money to get the renovations done: He just needs to arrange them.

As a 7A case, the building's future is uncertain. CHTU cofounder Joel Feingold said at least three potential buyers had expressed interest after seeing it listed for sale by Tema, but they backed out after seeing the million-dollar liens on it, which any new owner would have to pay.

Natasha Kersey, HPD's deputy press secretary, said that the "tenants are not in limbo," because the administrator "actively manages the building and oversees rehabilitation work" until "a responsible owner demonstrates the capacity to manage it."

But what happens if no one else wants to buy the building, and Tema can't prove he can maintain it?

"We're at a really important crossroads in the history of New York City, and potentially at a really important crossroads in how we conceive of solutions to the housing crisis," Feingold said.

Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani has promised tenants in rent-stabilized apartments that he'll freeze

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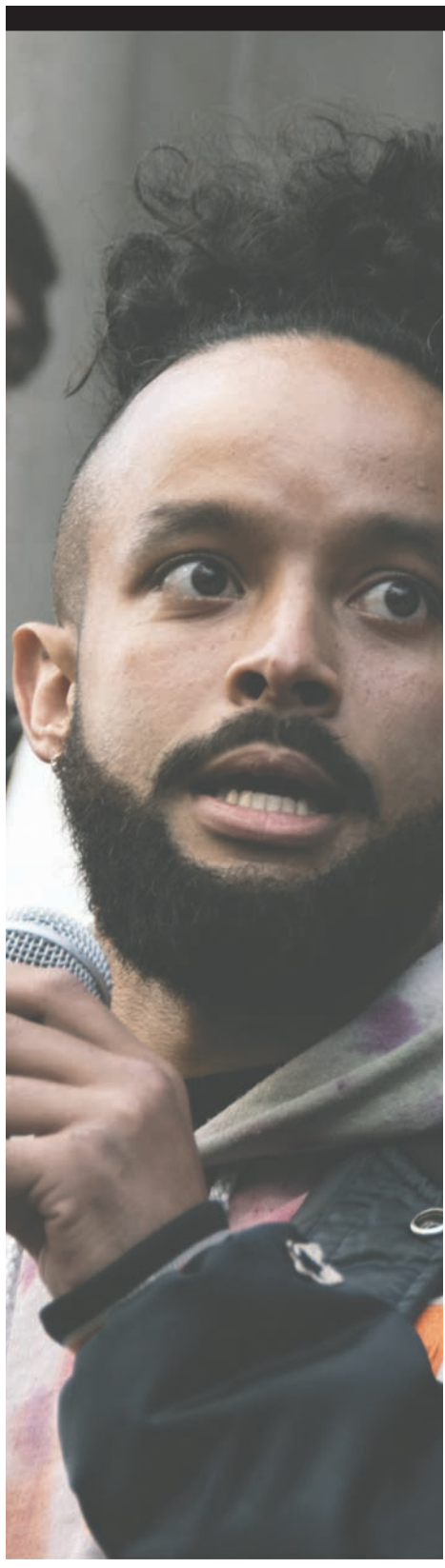

ROMAN BROSZKOWSKI

ERIK DILAN/TWITTER

NORTH BROOKLYN SHOWDOWN

ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVIST TAKES ON REAL ESTATE ALLY IN AD 54

By Sander Hicks

I remember the first time I met Assemblymember Erik Dilan. It was just last year at one of his rare public appearances. I asked him about a local controversy, and he didn't know much about it. A private sports foundation had co-opted the powers that be at Highland Park and superimposed a "disc golf" course on top of pedestrian walkways. It's literally an accident waiting to happen. The park is full of people — mostly Hispanic families and immigrants — with big picnics and weekend barbecues. Private money should never have been allowed to create a disc golf course that could seriously injure a child.

Dilan didn't seem concerned. He said he had only recently heard about it, and gave a blasé answer about "wanting to please everybody."

But he doesn't please everybody. Dilan is one of the State Assembly's top recipients of real estate industry money while his working-class North Brooklyn district is threatened with gentrification. AD 54 has some of the highest rates of childhood lead poisoning in the city, but Dilan has blocked lead-abatement bills while taking thousands of dollars from landlords. He didn't lead any pandemic-era mutual aid and he rarely communicates with us constituents.

Yet Dilan continues in office. Seven years after his father, State Senator Martin Malavé Dilan, was trounced by democratic socialist Julia Salazar, and four years after Salazar's ally Sandy Nurse won a City Council seat, Dilan remains in the Assembly. A DSA-backed candidate failed to defeat him in 2022, losing by just 190 votes. With Zohran Mamdani winning AD 54 by 71–29% in the June Democratic primary, the incumbent has never looked more vulnerable.

In 2026, Dilan may finally meet his match.

Christian Celeste Tate — known as "CCT" — is a 31-year-old anti-poverty activist. During Mamdani's mayoral run, he led a team of more than 200 volunteers canvassing the eastern part of AD 54, where Mamdani struggled in the primary. Tate has received the coveted DSA endorsement, which guarantees an army of volunteers.

We met recently for lunch on Bushwick Avenue. We began by talking about his day job at the Bridgespan Group. Bridgespan is a consultancy that aims to bring big "Top Three Consulting Firm" corporate muscle to the social impact, nonprofit world.

"It's about reallocating the wealth some in our society have spent lifetimes accumulating," Tate said. "I appreciate what I've learned from that work — but part of why I'm here, why I organize so much outside that job, is because I don't think that work alone will solve our problems."

Though he only joined DSA in April, he's enthusiastic about being a member. I joked that maybe the campaign should emphasize the DSA endorsement in Bushwick, but present as more "progressive" in conservative Cypress Hills.

Tate stopped me.

"I don't have any interest in skirting around with folks. I think people want to be spoken to like adults and told what you stand for," he said. "Part of our assignment is to reintroduce people to democratic socialism, because enormous money and political energy have gone into alienating people from it."

Inside DSA (of which I am also a member), I'd heard some worry that CCT didn't speak Spanish — an apparent liability in a district where 50% of voters are of Latino origin. But at the Mexican restaurant where we met, his Spanish flowed easily.

"My Spanish is alright. I studied it when I was young, but most of what I have comes from organizing here," he said. "I'm North Brooklyn chapter chair of New York Communities for Change. It's a heavily Spanish-speaking community, and most of my Spanish is practiced at the doors."

I asked him for his pitch. What are the top three issues? How will he win?

"First, keeping New Yorkers in their homes. Fighting displacement pressure is something just about everyone here struggles with.

"Second, protecting our neighbors against ICE. You cannot run a worthwhile campaign right now without talking about the effects of fascism on our communities and the importance of standing up for one another.

"Third, investing in community safety. That's top of mind for folks, especially on the East New York side, but really district-wide."

I pushed back on that last one — it sounded a little like Andrew Cuomo running on hiring more police.

Tate clarified: "When I talk about community safety, I mean investing in communities in ways we know reduce crime: after-school and summer youth programming, mental health support, substance-abuse treatment, homelessness support."

I mentioned an anti-Mamdani mailer targeting Black voters. It noted that national DSA officially supports police abolition, a stance Mamdani disavowed. Could this create vulnerability for an African-American democratic socialist running in a racially and politically diverse district? Even if he doesn't run on it, won't a conservative PAC say: "As a DSA member, you support Defund the Police"?

"I'm sure you're right," Tate said. "I'm sure PACs will come. What I've found in my community work is that this is one of those areas where we agree more than disagree. I don't think you'll find anybody — on either side of whatever aisle exists — who thinks we don't need more and better summer programming, or who doesn't believe kids would stay out of trouble if they had positive spaces.

"The defund movement was never just about spending less on police — it was always about spending more on community investment, on real tools of community safety."

Since his narrow victory over DSA-endorsed Sami Nemir Olivares in 2022, Dilan hasn't changed. A shrewder politician would have taken some action — reaching out to progressives, finding common ground, doing something to preempt the next primary challenge from the left.

Dilan has done none of that. He relies on the Democratic Party old guard and old family friends. I asked Tate if he has encountered Dilan's most loyal supporters.

"The folks I meet most are folks who can't find him, and who've been looking for him," he said. "Those are the folks excited to see a hungry, young democratic socialist ready to do the work of bringing real representation to a community that deserves it."

THE CHALLENGER: *Christian Celeste Tate is running to represent Assembly District 54.*

INCUMBENT: *Erik Dilan has repped Assembly District 54 since 2014 and served on City Council for 12 years before that.*

BUILDING MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM IN NEW YORK

By Grace Mauser

On September 6, Bernie Sanders and Zohran Mamdani packed a public school auditorium in Brooklyn. When asked what to do to make their vision of politics successful, Zohran answered, "Join DSA." As those paying attention to New York City and state politics know, Mamdani's victory in the New York City mayoral primary did not emerge solely from a savvy media strategy and a likable candidate. Zohran proudly calls New York City Democratic Socialists of America (NYC-DSA) his political home, and we worked hand in hand to develop the campaign strategy, culture, and day-to-day execution to make him the mayor of the largest city in the United States.

Now New York City's left finds itself in thrilling but uncharted waters. As Ralph Miliband reminds us, "Electoral victory only gives one the right to rule, not the power to rule." Our path forward to governing in New York City must build on the electoral and co-governance strategy that NYC-DSA has been developing and refining for nearly nine years. We have a model for winning mass campaigns; we have a model for true co-governance with legislators; now we will bring our experience to City Hall.

Mamdani became an active member of the NYC-DSA chapter in 2017, during a period of tremendous growth for our project. Inspired by the surprise success of Sanders's socialist message in the 2016 Democratic primaries and hardened by Donald Trump's harrowing victory, socialists and leftists across the country felt inspired and compelled to become a more effective force.

In New York City, NYC-DSA tested our theory that socialism could win by experimenting in two city council races in Brooklyn: Khader El-Yateem and Jabari Brisport. In both races, NYC-DSA organizers, including a young Mamdani, built independent field operations that recruited hundreds of unpaid, highly motivated volunteers. Though we lost both races, we learned that our model, which demands that volunteers be trusted with campaign leadership and strategy decisions, is highly scalable, and if the conditions are right, we can win.

That ethos has guided every NYC-DSA race, including Zohran's initial race for State Assembly in 2020. All 11 of our elected socialist officials ("socialists in office," or "SIOs") have won their seats thanks to the commitment to distributed leadership and invitation into strategic decision-making that our campaigns prioritize.

Unlike traditional, establishment campaigns, we intentionally identify, train, and elevate people who have the capacity, interest, and potential to lead canvasses themselves. These highly skilled field leads ensure canvassers are trained, manage canvass materials, and handle any on-the-ground issues or questions. Some field leads are brought into even higher-level strategy. Known as field coordinators, these volunteers manage other field leads and have input into key decisions about where, when, and how a campaign canvasses.

It would have been impossible for staff to personally manage the amount of canvassing that was happening. There were dozens of events every weekend; staff couldn't physically be in all those places. So you have to train people.

And then you have to trust them.

As observers look to Zohran's race to see the future of the Democratic party, we know the reason he won and it is simple: trust the volunteers.

There will be some mistakes. But traditional political campaigns do not have this trust. They don't believe that regular people who are excited by a political movement can handle this level of responsibility, and as a result, they tell themselves: "Field doesn't scale in a citywide or statewide race." That is true — if you don't trust your volunteers.

Though canvassing is at the heart of every NYC-DSA campaign, this commitment to the political development and strategic acumen of our core volunteers expands beyond the field into other tactical areas, like communications, fundraising, and policy. Establishment campaigns and the professional political class want us to believe they have inimitable skills. NYC-DSA believes that everyday New Yorkers have the ability and power to run our own political operation, and Zohran's campaign put that belief into action.

The breadth and excitement of the campaign also brought more organizations into this campaigning style. Organizations that have invested years into the political development and leadership of their members — like CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities; DRUM — Desis Rising Up and Moving; Jews For Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ); and United Auto Workers Region 9A — were able to seize this mentality and deeply activate their members on not only canvassing but campaign strategy.

A truly powerful political operation, however, goes beyond simply winning elections. We are not interested in just electing politicians who self-identify as socialists and relying on their individual principles to guide them to the right choices. Individuals falter — a stronger force is necessary to grapple with the complications of governing as socialists. So, in 2020, after five socialists won New York State legislative offices and joined State Senator Julia Salazar in Albany, we formed the Socialists in Office Committee (SIO); it was joined by the City Socialists in Office Committee (CSIO) the following year.

These committees were designed to enable NYC-DSA to strategize alongside our elected officials. The elected officials and their staff meet with NYC-DSA leadership every week to share information, collectively choose priorities, and cohere on key votes. The primary purpose of this co-governance model is to enable an inside/outside strategy, where elected officials and staff with inside information and access can inform organizers on the outside about how they can best apply pressure to achieve our collective goals.

This strategy has been used to implement some of the most transformative state policy in the last decade, including tax increases on the wealthy in 2021 and the Build Public Renewables Act in 2023. Both efforts paired inside organizing and information-sharing with a robust outside pressure model, including canvassing in key legislators' districts and holding citizen lobbying meetings.

The principle that guides our campaigns — that anyone can and should be empowered to control their political reality — is present in our SIO project. The NYC-DSA representation on the SIO committee is made up of elected, unpaid NYC-DSA members. DSA representatives on the committees are determined through internal elections, and any member can run for those spots. We do not treat working with elected officials as a sacred job, available only to political elites; it is a job for any serious organizer who wants to put the time and energy into our co-governance work.

Because of this, NYC-DSA's SIO project is perhaps the most successful leftist governing project in the country. Though only a few years old and far from perfect, it has kept socialist elected officials connected to an organized base of activists and has helped insulate them from legislative leadership's pressure tactics. A lone progressive may have all the right ideas, but when the speaker of the State Assembly threatens to cut money from their district and staff? Without an organized group to strategize with and rely on for support, it becomes all too appealing to make questionable compromises. This pattern helped solidify the Left's long disillusionment with electoral politics, an orientation we are just beginning to move away from.

JACK CALIFANO

UNIVERSAL CHILDCARE NOW
CHILD CARE FOR ALL
OUR TIME for AN AFFORDABLE NYC
NEW YORK CITY DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

SUMMER: *Three hundred Zohran Mamdani volunteers pose with the candidate in Herbert Von King Park before going out to canvas in the surrounding Bed-Stuy neighborhood.*

WINTER: *Canvassers from NYC-DSA and its offshoot group Our Time For An Affordable New York gather in Lower Manhattan's Seward Park on Dec. 13.*

Through the later part of the 20th century into the 2010s, the Left embraced a protest model. We were outsiders only, and our job was to apply pressure on the decision-makers. This model can result in some success but rarely has it resulted in sustained power. In some ways, being an outsider is more comfortable — you can focus solely on the demand and leave the messiness of implementation to those with power. But we all know remaining outsiders to policymaking power is insufficient to achieving any socialist goal within our lifetimes. The SIO projects make significant headway toward breaking the Left's outsider orientation. NYC-DSA takes collective responsibility for both the success and failures of our socialist elected officials.

CO-GOVERNANCE

SIO should be the model we build on to develop a co-governance structure with the Mamdani mayoral administration. NYC-DSA has demonstrated that we can scale a radically open campaign model from a State Assembly race to a mayoral campaign; and we have shown that it is possible to hold a bloc of leftist elected officials together and connected to a mass base. Now we must combine and evolve the two ideas. Doing so will require three things: bringing more organizations into the structure, developing beyond an inside/outside strategy, and ensuring everyday New Yorkers have ways to engage in all levels of the work.

1) Bringing more organizations into the structure

First, we must include more groups in co-governance with the Mamdani administration. NYC-DSA is the only organization in the SIO projects. While this has worked so far, the geographic scale and unilateral power of the mayor demands a wider base. Zohran has already united community organizations and unions across the city with his campaign. Significantly, many of those groups also have organized, active bases that were excited and engaged in the campaigns. Now is the time to form a Left-labor coalition; an opportunity to collectively enact a populist agenda is a great incentive for these groups to put their differences aside and strategize together.

2) Beyond an inside/outside strategy

Second, we must evolve our inside/outside strategy. The inside/outside strategy is primarily about extracting as many victories as possible from an ostensibly resistant leadership and administration. But we will soon have a mayor from within our movement. There will still be enemies to pressure both at the city and state levels (Governor Kathy Hochul is certainly not excited to implement the Mamdani agenda), but mobilizing and preparing lower levels of government to support and enact policy goals from the top is different from pressuring high-level decision-makers. We cannot fall into the Left's comfort zone of protesting power.

This dynamic was part of hindering Bill de Blasio's administration. Most advocates chose an oppositional approach to the de Blasio administration (mainly looking to maximize their leverage on single-issue campaigns), and this orientation ushered in a collapse of that coalition. The young idealists who had entered the de Blasio administration on the inside took different tacks — some left the administration disillusioned with the mayor, others felt he had gotten a raw deal and became disillusioned with the Left. None had the power to use their relationships to change the underlying dynamics facing the Left or the administration.

The inside portion of the inside/outside strategy under de Blasio had little to show for itself after eight years, and the outside portion was not in a stronger position either. This time, we must utilize the Mamdani coalition's membership and the massive volunteer base to create mass mobilization to enact Mamdani's agenda, contesting opponents within and without the government itself.

Groups engaged in co-governing leadership must mobilize their members to knock doors and lobby for the changes necessary to enact Zohran's agenda. Call it mass governance.

3) Ensuring everyday New Yorkers have ways to engage

This is why the third piece is key.

Just like in every NYC-DSA campaign, we must ensure that regular supporters have clear ways to engage on all levels of this work. This will mean creating active policy campaigns that will enable the 50,000 canvassers and 500 field leads from Zohran's campaign to put their door-knocking and field strategy skills to use. Additionally, we must ensure groups engaged in co-governing leadership are also mobilizing their members to knock doors and lobby for the changes necessary to enact Zohran's agenda.

Further, we must plug Zohran organizers and supporters into lower-level city institutions en masse. New York City has hundreds of small semigovernmental bodies that are typically ceded to less progressive forces, such as community boards, and parent-teacher associations and community education councils. The city also has hundreds of opportunities for people to volunteer, including at libraries and parks. Both the Mamdani administration and groups organizing with it should work to encourage supporters to engage in these spaces. We have the opportunity to create a sense of mass ownership over the city and build support for Zohran's agenda from the bottom of city government to the top.

Winning this election was shocking, but NYC-DSA has shocked before. Winning is hard, but we know from experience that governing is harder. The same forces that fight leftists in elections fight us in office, and we must continually organize and mobilize to beat back those powers, even when press and public attention is turned elsewhere. We must use this victory and the strength of the mayor's office to build the power needed to reshape New York into a city by and for the working class.

Grace Mauser is the co-chair of New York City Democratic Socialists of America. This article originally appeared at convergencemag.com.

GO TO THE MOVIES WITH MIRA NAIR

By Manvi Jalan

Mira Nair's movies examine the complex challenges, inequalities, dreams and desires we face in our lives. She often tackles uncomfortable realities and asks provocative questions with nuance, without judgement, and with a sense of humor. Her stories carry gravitas, yet are still entertaining. She has called New York, India and Uganda home, and the many places she has ties to show up in her movies.

Nair's films are a reflection of the multitudes she carries within her. She first got involved with theatre at Delhi University in India, and then discovered documentaries at Harvard University. She talks about how the lives and stories of people on the streets inspired movies like *Salaam Bombay!* and *Mississippi Masala*. It was only later in her career that she drew inspiration from books.

Nair started a nonprofit school called Maisha in Kampala, Uganda. "The mantra of Maisha if we don't tell our own stories, no one else will," she said.

Regarding her son the mayor-elect, "Zohran has been marinated in love, not just from us, his parents, but from intergenerational family life," Nair told Harper's Bazaar in November. "He's so secure in knowing who he is." In other interviews, she has talked about how Zohran spent a lot of time in India, Uganda, and South Africa, as well as New York, and how he was exposed to the world, including his father's work as an academic and his mother's work. He knew how they thought and what they cared about.

When asked about how he will help New Yorkers find (romantic) love, Zohran quips that New Yorkers don't have time for love cause they're too busy surviving, but when they can afford the city and move out of survival, there's room for falling in love.

At their core, Mira Nair's stories are about seeking love, and peace, negotiating life and death. When we're out of survival mode, we can love. Or maybe they'll reveal how it is far more difficult to experience secure love when people are fighting for scraps.

My favorite Mira Nair movies, in no particular order:

SALAAM BOMBAY! (1988)

Before there was *Slumdog Millionaire,* there was *Salaam Bombay!* An ode to Mumbai's street children, the movie follows Krishna, a young boy who can't return to his home till he makes 500 rupees to pay for setting his brother's motorbike on fire. He ends up in Bombay (now Mumbai), selling tea in the underbelly of the city, near a brothel. There he makes friends, falls in love, and navigates survival.

Nair cast street children in the film, listening to their stories about gangs, sex, and running away. She embedded those stories in the plot, and put the children into acting workshops. "The combination of childhood and wisdom in their faces is very difficult to find in actors who don't come from the streets," she says. "I think they felt that for the first time others were interested in them as human beings."

Nair established the Salaam Baalak Trust in 1989, using some of the film's profits to support street children, including housing, education and vocational training. The cast received stipends for school after production. For some, it was a gateway out of life on the streets.

The writing, direction and acting are raw and feel authentic, and paint a vivid picture. Nair's treatment of the characters is human, not sugarcoated or sympathetic, but it feels honest and dignified. The writing is both hilarious and heartbreaking.

Salaam Bombay! is in Hindi. It won the Caméra d'Or and the Prix du Publique at the Cannes Film Festival in 1988, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

INDIA CABARET (1985)

Nair's *India Cabaret* is an unflinchingly honest tale of Bombay's cabaret dancers in the 1980s. We meet Rekha and Rosy, two dancers who ended up in the same "line." They were the only two who agreed to be filmed dancing, and openly shared their stories. Rekha is fiery, confident and playful. Rosy's family knows of her work and refuses to accept her. Nair interviews the club owner and the men who frequent the club and speak of how they want their wives to be "sati savitri, chaste," but desire "the whore." She also speaks with one regular's wife, who is aware of his escapades.

Nair brilliantly juxtaposes the dancers' dreams, prisons and desires with those of the housewife. The housewife yearns to dream, to be free, to explore the world on her own terms outside the tyranny of a man, while the cabaret dancers yearn for a man, a husband who will take care of them, a family that will nourish them, stability and protection instead of independence. The paradox of desire is that a new desire replaces an old one once we get what we want, and we get trapped into an eternal loop of discontent. The antidote? Gratitude. The antidote, contentment. The antidote, surrender and acceptance of what is, and the humility to learn the lessons this present moment demands.

The cabaret dancers are both shunned and desired, liberated in their sensuality and financially free, but outcast. The empathy, honesty and skill with which Nair interviews them, and shoots and pieces together this film is exquisite. If you watch only one movie on this list, watch this one.

Where to watch: **Criterion Channel**

MONSOON WEDDING (2001)

In this fun, vibrant family flick. Aditi Verma is to be married to Hemant Rai, a young "non-resident Indian" citizen who lives in Texas. Her sister Ria has a secret she's been guarding, and so does Aditi. The wedding decorator has been working on weddings for decades, and wonders when it'll be his turn. There are beautifully shot parallels between the wealthy families and the working class, and a

lively portrayal of all the chaos that ensues when two families come together for a wedding, all the skeletons in the closet. In its specificity, the story becomes universal.

Monsoon Wedding was one of Nair's biggest commercial successes. She worked with screenwriter Sabrina Dhawan, then a film student, who is also Punjabi. They wanted to make a film about loud, vibrant, spirited Punjabi families, and drew from their own cultures. They shot it in 30 days. *The Laughing Club,* a documentary Nair shot during the monsoon season "was directly the genesis, stylistically and emotionally, in every way, of *Monsoon Wedding*."

LYNNE FOSTER

THE NAMESAKE (2006)

An adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake,* this is the heartbreaking story of the Ganguli family, set between Kolkata and New York. Ashoke (a quietly brilliant Irffan Khan) comes back home to get married to Ashima (played with depth by Tabu) who leaves everything she knows to emigrate with her new husband. They name their son Gogol after an author Ashoke loves. The film follows the novel's plot, a story of loss, grief, home and all the sacrifices of an immigrant family.

Have a box of tissues ready. This is one of the most melancholic movies in this list. It's ultimately about family and the relationship between parents raising children who end up being different culturally because they've grown up in this foreign land, and then in grief learning to value what was taken for granted. Nair talks about how Kal Penn was cast as Gogol because 14-year-old Zohran egged her on to do it, which led to Penn auditioning for the role.

Where to watch: **Hulu**

QUEEN OF KATWE (2016)

Based on the true story of Phiona Mutesi, a young girl from the slums of Kampala, Uganda, who was discovered to be a chess prodigy and rose to international prominence with the help of her coach, Robert Katende. Zohran Mamdani makes a cameo in this film, and his song "No. 1 Spice" is featured.

This is a wholesome Disney family movie. It's a sweet story of how lives can change when people like Katende take a chance on children with nothing. It humbly reminds us not to look down on the intelligence of those who have less, and the very real risk and fear of dreaming is sometimes tasting luxury, or a better life, and then not having a way back to it and so resigning to not dreaming at all feels safer. In this case, though, Phiona finds her way out of the slums.

Where to watch: **Disney+**

HYSTERICAL BLINDNESS (2002)

A drama that tells the story of three women in pursuit of love, negotiating loss and men who seem to leave. Debbie (Uma Thurman) is a young, insecure and awkward 20-something, while her bestie, a single mother, just wants to have some fun. They reminisce about their high school days when boys would be circling them. Meanwhile, Debbie's mother cautiously steps into a romance with a customer at the diner she works at.

Debbie's story, desperately seeking love while attracting men who are emotionally unavailable, is paralleled with the secure relationship developing between her mother and her new boyfriend. It's a nuanced story about all the perils of desire, of being wanted, of love and the loss that comes with it.

I love how subtle and complex the characters are, and the cinematography contains brilliant shots that powerfully parallel the women's love stories.

THE PEREZ FAMILY (1995)

In *The Perez Family,* a comedy, Dorita Perez, a sugarcane worker, leaves Cuba for Miami. As single women are not favored by immigration authorities, she has to find a sponsor, so she needs a family. Luckily, Perez is a common last name, and she happens to be standing next to Juan Perez, who, when asked if he has a wife, says yes. The officer who greets them at the dock assumes the wife is Dorita. The movie is hilarious, with some brilliant writing, compelling actors, and a powerful reflection on the illusions of the "American Dream," the immigration system and Cuban history.

I love this movie for its timeless relevance. The immigration system has always been bureaucratic and challenging. The American Dream's mythic promise still draws people to the shores of the U.S. All dreams are illusions, all desires look rosy in our imagination and quite different in reality. To immigrate is to leave home where life is familiar, where the people you love are present, and where you know you belong legally, culturally, and in the hearts of those who love you. To come to a foreign land is challenging, unfamiliar, and reminds you that you do not belong—neither legally, culturally, nor in the hearts of strangers who do not know you—until you earn a place. To immigrate can also be rewarding, exciting, and a thrilling way to grow and meet a new chosen family. At home, we yearn for freedom outside, outside, we yearn for the comfort of home. The film may offer insight into a new perspective and does so with great humor.

Where to Watch: **ScreenPix**

MISSISSIPPI MASALA (1991)

An interracial love story, set in Mississippi, of Ugandan-born Meena and African-American Demetrius, who fight for their life together. Meena's family was exiled from Uganda during Idi Amin's regime because the dictator believed Africa was for Black Africans. It was quite a revolutionary film when it was released in 1991, and it still is: a love story as a lens to examine racial prejudice, stereotypes and history. It's funny, it's poignant and has the right dash of masala (if you don't know what masala means, you'll learn when you watch the movie). Nair makes cameos as a gossiping aunty, a fantastic example of how she doesn't take herself too seriously. (And while doing the research for this movie, Nair met Zohran's father, Mahmood Mamdani.)

Where to watch: **HBO Max**

A TAYLOR SWIFT ALBUM FOR THE POST-WOKE ERA

The Life of a Showgirl
By Taylor Swift
Republic, Oct. 2025, 42 minutes

By Nina Smith

Among the subtle beginnings of an oft-forgotten track, Taylor Swift buries one of the most honest lyrics of her discography: "Suddenly this summer it's clear," she confesses over a simple guitar line on "Peace," "I never had the courage of my convictions/As long as danger is near." Sonically understated, with an emotional climax built solely on the strength of its earnest lyricism, the track fits right in toward the end of *Folklore*, Swift's elegant alternative folk release that surprised fans at the height of the pandemic. "Peace" ruminates on what have since become some of Swift's favorite themes: love, fame, and whether either, or both, can end happily. "You got a friend in me," she promises the object of her affections, but worries, "would it be enough if I could never give you peace?"

Five years after *Folklore,* Taylor Swift seems to have found peace, or at least a version of it, in her post-Eras Tour career high, her football star fiancé, and the completely expected commercial success of her October release, *The Life of a Showgirl*. As she sings on "Opalite," one of *Showgirl's* numerous boring love songs, "You had to make your own sunshine/But now the sky is opalite."

Showgirl, as an album, is largely a disappointment from an artist who tops every chart — a skill that, according to her fans, is based entirely on the strength of her songwriting, and not her stack of limited-release vinyls bolstering her sales numbers. Though its production is crisp, its lyrics are graceless at best and at worst, embarrassing and immature. With glitzy, manicured aesthetics but a sonic profile belonging in a Target commercial, the album lacks enough of a vision to justify its own synths.

Conceptually, *Showgirl* is redundant, telling the same love-saved-me fairytale over and over. On the piano pop ballad "Eldest Daughter," remarkable only for its cringe-inducing lyrics, Swift remembers, "So many traitors/Smooth operators/But I'm never gonna break that vow/I'm never gonna leave you now." On "Elizabeth Taylor," which hides a lack of genuine meaning under the cover of Old Hollywood imagery, Swift reiterates, "All the right guys promised they'd stay/Under bright lights, they withered away/But you bloom." And on the album's opening track and only single, "The Fate of Ophelia," Swift bastardizes Shakespearean references to regale the listener about being saved not only by love, but by a lover — by a man. "No longer drowning and deceived," Swift sings, "All because you came for me." The sentiment feels outdated in a world where even *Vogue* decries having a boyfriend — almost as outdated as Swift referring unironically to other women as bitches twice on the album. But Swift's feminism has always been shoddy and self-serving, and any other political statements from her are few and far between.

It was two years into the first Trump presidency when Swift broke her political silence for the first time, on October 8, 2018. Ahead of the midterm elections, Swift wrote in an Instagram post, "In the past I've been reluctant to publicly voice my political opinions, but due to several events in my life and in the world in the past two years, I feel very differently about that now." After staying quiet throughout Trump's election in 2016, which coincided with the year she "disappeared" from the public eye, Swift seemed to have reached her political breaking point, endorsing Democratic congressional candidates Phil Bredesen and Jim Cooper and citing her "Tennessee values."

Swift faced backlash from an alt-right contingent that had, in the absence of any contradiction, claimed her as their own. But for many fans, the post was a relief — the beginning of a brief uptick in Swift's political engagement. 2019's *Lover* unleashed a barrage of pseudo-political songs. "You Need to Calm Down" was the flashy single, proclaiming, "Shade never made anybody less gay," complete with a rainbow-washed music video featuring what appears to be every queer celebrity in Swift's contact list. "The Man," an upbeat Girlboss anthem, lamented the gendered double standards imposed on her career, and "Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince" told a dystopian love story with Swift reciting, "American stories burning before me/I'm feeling helpless, the damsels are depressed/Boys will be boys then, where are the wise men?" Though Swift dips into politics in the verses, the chorus is sappy and self-absorbed: "It's been a long time coming, but/It's you and me, that's my whole world."

"Miss Americana" exposes an ugly truth: More often than not, Swift's moments of political assertion are not a manifestation of fierce principles. Rather, current events provide a compelling context for her personal dramas. Now, while a second Trump presidency is in full nightmarish swing, *The Life of a Showgirl* sees Swift crooning about Travis Kelce's sexual prowess and her suburban housewife fantasies: "Got me dreaming 'bout a driveway with a basketball hoop," she sings on "Wi$h Li$t," "I just want you."

Eerily silent amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza, tight-lipped through ICE raids, economic devastation and attacks on trans rights, Swift has never seemed less attached to her political convictions. Usually a big fan of copyright law (see: *Taylor's Version*), Swift has opted not to publicly comment on the Trump administration's use of her music in three videos on social media, even when peers like Olivia Rodrigo and Beyonce have spoken out in the same situation.

"I never had the courage of my convictions," Swift sang in July 2020 as COVID raged, just months after the police killing of George Floyd had ignited Black Lives Matter protests across the country. It's awfully regular, in a time of great political unrest, to wonder if you're doing enough — if your workday, your organic produce, your ballot and your recycling bins are enough of a down payment for the world you want to live in. But as a billionaire with a captive audience of millions — proven by the tens of thousands who registered to vote after she shared a link to Vote.org on Instagram in 2023 — Taylor Swift has the responsibility to put down a higher deposit.

But *The Life of a Showgirl* is a Taylor Swift album fit for the post-woke era. Stale and shimmeringly out of touch, it disproves the existence of any political backbone Swift might have been hiding, as she chooses instead to keep singing as the *Titanic* sinks.

GARY MARTIN

WHEN A CONSPIRACY THEORIST TAKES A CORPORATE CEO HOSTAGE

Bugonia
DIRECTED BY YORGOS LANTHIMOS
FOCUS FEATURES, OCT. 2025, 118 MINUTES

By Michael Kanyongolo

Sometimes I wish conspiracies were real, and all of society's problems could be traced back to one entity, the curtain pulled back on the source of our suffering. Yorgos Lanthimos' latest film, *Bugonia,* centers on humans' desperate need for an explanation, for the complexities of the world to be wrapped neatly in a nice bow.

Lanthimos' past films are anything but explainable, rivalling the late, great David Lynch in intentional awkwardness and mind-bending social commentary. His most mainstream hit, *Poor Things*, was a confounding display of wonder and subversion, laughing in the face of coming-of-age tales across the ages.

His 2015 film, *The Lobster,* could be correctly described as both a hilarious dark comedy and a deeply depressing account of humankind's desperation for love. A hard line to walk, but he does it with sadistic glee. It is not uncommon for his films to evoke laughter at the most harrowing of circumstances, poking fun at the dark corners of the human psyche.

So it was a delight to see a trailer for his next film, *Bugonia,* led by his frequent collaborator Emma Stone and the unnervingly excellent Jesse Plemons. It promised a bizarre mix of class commentary, conspiracy, and the idiosyncrasies of corporate culture juxtaposed against those it exploits.

Does it deliver? Partially.

Its two leads shine as opposite ends of the conspiracy spectrum, beginning with Jesse Plemons as Teddy Gatz, a greasy-haired, basement-dwelling, self-castrating and conspiracy-addled wreck of a man. His character feels like an amalgamation of Plemons' past roles, a creepy, calculating individual with a face of stone and a mind steeped in pain.

Emma Stone, on the other end of the spectrum, plays Michelle, a high-powered CEO with a master's in corporate jargon and fake smiles. It is truly hilarious to see her corporate mannerisms within the context of a hostage situation, whether it is to "have a dialogue" about being trapped in a basement, or that she would "love to keep the conversation going." So often do we see corporations respond to serious accusations with obfuscation, so having the power dynamics flipped shines a spotlight on the ridiculousness of their tactics.

Rounding out the main cast is Donny Gatz, Teddy's timid, cherubic, and deeply troubled cousin. He acts as both a straight man for the absurdity of Teddy's beliefs and comic relief for the audience, though with Lanthimos, comic relief usually comes with a heavy price, and this film is no different.

So with such strong characters, seamless acting, and expert cinematography paired with a powerfully evocative soundtrack, why doesn't this film fully deliver on its premise?

The primary problem with this film is its pacing — the Achilles heel of most middling films. The second act lags a bit as the hostage element, while initially compelling, doesn't hold its weight long enough to reach its conclusion. There's little to no stress of discovery, and what little threat there is is played for laughs.

Teddy and Michelle's interactions are displayed through tight, unwavering close-ups, with an occasional reaction shot from Donny played for laughs. This adds to the emotionally claustrophobic setting, but lacks progression. Teddy and Michelle disagree; they argue, their arguing escalates, quick cut to Donny for a reaction shot, and then violence. Rinse and repeat. It has been done before and done better.

emma stone jesse plemons
a film by yorgos lanthimos
BUGONIA
directed by yorgos lanthimos screenplay by will tracy
only in theaters october 24

Most notably, the style of dialogue is a departure from Lanthimos' previous films. Usually his characters deliver stilted, cryptic lines with flat expressions, like a Wes Anderson film where the joy and whimsy is replaced with despair and depression. Every unusual phrase, every Lynchian delivery, reveals a world of perspective for each character. It makes you lean in and hang on every word, trying to decipher what was really going on in their heads. Perhaps if you listen closely enough, the absurd situation will finally make sense, and that uncomfortable feeling will dissipate.

Of course, it never does. But with *Bugonia,* that feeling hardly begins.

The slightly underwhelming middle section is broken up by flashbacks with truly compelling imagery, like a sour-faced child holding IV tubes that lead up into the sky, tethering his ailing mother to the Earth while she drifts aimlessly above. Or a sick woman lying in a tub, stuck with excessively large acupuncture needles while her son removes them one by one, forming a bouquet of empty syringes. Illness is depicted through the eyes of those who must cope with its consequences with visual depictions of loss, the inability to let go, and the futility in trying to ease the pain of another: brilliant.

Every Chekov's gun fires, every puzzle piece of the narrative falls neatly into place. And when the last act picks up, it feels like the film is given a rousing dose of adrenaline. The slow ruminations give way to a deliberate jumble of chaos as the elements that have been talked about for an hour and a half finally make an appearance.

The final twist, while predictable, was executed in an absurd and thoroughly entertaining manner. You can guess it from the first 30 seconds of the trailer, but I think that was intentional. Playing along, testing your assumption against the events in the film, is meant to be part of the intrigue.

The very last scene is a montage of misanthropic proportions that would make Holden Caulfield weep with joy. I'm convinced Lanthomos signed on to direct after reading this scene alone, for its painstakingly long runtime does nothing to help the audience feel comfortable, and left everyone in my theater in stunned silence after the credits rolled.

Its bleak ending is actually hinted at with the title of the film, *Bugonia*. Bugonia refers to the ancient Greek belief that bloodlessly sacrificing a cow would lead to the spontaneous release of bees from its corpse, improving the surrounding agriculture, using death to heal the world. Bees are a strong symbol throughout the film, and the ending fully realizes its titular reference

Bugonia is a flawed film, but its flaws are greatly outweighed by its stronger elements, making for an entertaining, if inconsistent, delve into conspiracy and delusion. While it may disappoint Lanthimos fans (such as myself) due to its relatively tame execution, mainstream audiences may find it more palatable, right up until the last three minutes. Either way, this film is deserving of a theater watch, so catch it before it is replaced with something much more conventional.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

Last Radiance: Radical Lives, Bright Deaths
By Karen Malpede
Vine Leaves Press, 296 pages, Oct. 2025

By Sarah An Myers

The 1960s were a time of unprecedented upheaval in American politics and culture. Protest movements challenged hierarchies of race and gender and a brutal war in Vietnam. College campuses exploded with unrest. Inner cities went up in flames. High-profile assassinations of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X shook the faith of young Boomers in a brighter future. The sexual revolution shattered traditional puritanical norms. This experimental spirit also upended the arts and academia as bold new styles of music, literature, theater and historical inquiry flowered.

The playwright Karen Malpede partook fully of that era. Her new memoir provides a fearless, unsparing account of her life – her many erotic adventures, her longrunning political activism, the historic figures she befriended (and sometimes slept with), the agony of watching many of those closest to her wither away from cancer and the hard-earned wisdom she has gained across her life's journey.

Malpede grew up in a post-war suburb north of Chicago. Intense emotions filled her family's home as her parents screamed and fought sometimes even in the nude while carrying makeshift weapons. She, in fact, opens the book with a forced kiss shared between herself and her father. Though the boundaries never pressed further than that, that event set the tone for the rest of her story, always full of raging desire and love, but never truly to a point of physical injury.

Malpede joined her first protests as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin before moving to New York to study dramatic literature at Columbia. While visiting a lover in New Haven, Connecticut in May 1970, she found herself in the middle of a tense standoff between police and radical antiwar and Black Power protesters.

"On every roof stood National Guard and police snipers with rifles pointing down at us," Malpede writes of that protest. "They could pick us off one by one."

The book is filled with turning points in American protests, with the author stopping to reflect on how she experienced it.

Back in New York, Malpede joined the Living Theatre, where many of her friends, like Julian Beck and Judith Malina, would soon come together and eventually make a name for themselves as pioneers of Off-Off Broadway theater. This would also be where she would meet her future husband, George Bartenieff, who was both an accomplished theater and film actor.

SALEM KRIEGER

Malpede first takes us into the tales of her exciting youth. With enthralling honesty, she writes of Allen Ginsberg, Noam Chomsky, and Andrea Dworkin making appearances in her plays and her social circle, through scenes as diverse as hospital visitations, theater settings, and even sexual pleasure. Malpede is not one for censorship; she bares all on the page. No scene is censored in the slightest, as she takes us through sensual and surprising moments shared with Dworkin, Bartinieff and an unnamed lover who was at her side as she cared for her dear friend Julian Beck during his losing battle with cancer.

"This is also a play about sex," said Malpede at a book launch event in November. Indeed, it is. In times of distress, sexuality can be used as a holding vessel for grief. "In joy that is grief, I will lose myself… I can scare death away with my joy," writes Malpede. She is not one to let death kill her, too. This memoir is as much about getting lost in ecstasy as it is about getting lost in grief and sorrow.

Through Malpede, we catch a glimpse of her friends as she shares some of their most touching words. Feminist political philosopher Barbara Deming describes her decision to go off chemotherapy at the end of her life to allow her to "dance toward her death." These artists danced until their death, and Malpede, forever dances into the lives of those around her through her unrelenting search to touch the deepest wells of her life in writing and directing. The uniqueness of the book lies in not just who she knew but in how rare her raw and passionate voice is.

A RAW & RARE VOICE: *Karen Malpede, author of* Radical Lives, Bright Deaths.

THE LOVE OF HER LIFE

After Malpede met Bartenieff, she wrote many plays with him in mind, and became known for her psychologically and socially complex plays about topics such as the suicide of Iraq War veterans, the climate crisis and the U.S. torture program at Guantanamo. In her multi-layered plays, lead actors change gender, assume transgressed parent-offspring Oedipal identities, and transform from human into animal figures. Her works were often well-received by audiences but consistently panned by critics, especially at the New York Times. This, she notes, is something she shared with Julian Beck.

Malpede's 35-year relationship with Bartenieff was all-consuming as was her grief following his death from cancer in 2022. They carry physical intimacy well into their old age when intimacy is often thought of as lost and hopeless. At the height of the pandemic lockdown, they cook candlelight dinners together at home and Karen reads George passages from great works of literature he is no longer able to read for himself. The two still-devoted partners decide that if the Covid-19 virus enters their home and steals their lives, they will go out doing what they love. There is no dark, dementing fear of reality. They face it and their worlds together.

As a millennial, I am surrounded by a culture where Malpede's life can be interpreted as a distant fantasy. Where our generation suffers from endless loneliness epidemics, Malpede's fantastical journeys to Italy, to Egypt, to various apartments to make love in New York City in the 1960s is a land far, far away from my own in my world of incessant internet usage, texting as a replacement for communication, and stardom only viewed through social media.

Malpede's writing takes me to a time and place I knew existed in my heart but have not been able to find in many of today's stories by my peers. Her story demands to be read, not only for its adventurous nature, but simply for the sheer reminder that life can be lived to its fullest. One needn't become empty and dry as life continues, but rather, one can find some of their greatest inspiration and joy lodged into the harrowing challenges of personal life. In her words, "I was immune to human frailty… I was ALIVE. So was he" And so may we all be, too… through reading her.

PINNACLE PUSHBACK

Continued from Page 7

Crown Heights buildings, saying the company owed $10,350 in unpaid bills. Souffrant Forrest had to personally call to get the electricity back on in one of the buildings, reports Hell Gate.

The combination of staunch organizing efforts and subsequent support from elected officials coalescing around them, the work of Pinnacle Tenant's organizing appears to be paying off. On Dec. 11, an attorney for the city and for the Department of Housing Preservation & Development sent a rare letter to bankruptcy court, encouraging a delay in the proceedings.

Many tenants say they would welcome the chance to experience a different kind of housing, but mostly, they just want living conditions that afford them dignity.

As McKinney said, "My priority is to fix these issues, but if we could take ownership of these buildings, that would be great as well."

Kuo agrees. "I want Pinnacle not to be our landlord anymore. I want to have the time to decide, as a building, if we can do better ourselves," she said. "But mostly I want a fair landlord, someone who's not going to gouge us for our rent and [instead will] do good with our money."

TENANT UNION

Continued from Page 8

their rent as mayor. His platform also states that, in extreme cases of neglect by landlords like the owner of 567 St. John's Place, the city would "take control of their properties," and utilize the 7A program more.

The program, which came into widespread use during the massive housing abandonment of the late 1970s, is rarely used today. As of January 2025, only 26 buildings, with a total of 204 units, were in the program, HPD said then. In 1981, it oversaw more than 300 buildings, and in 2003, there were 123, according to a report by the Independent Budget Office that year.

But Feingold envisions something more than just the city stepping in with the 7A program and eventually selling the building to a different landlord.

The model mayoral administrations have used since the 1980s to create supposedly affordable housing has been offering subsidies to private companies for building below-market-rate units. Feingold is urging Mamdani to listen to tenants, like those at 567 St. John's Place, who want control of their building's future after the city takes it over from neglectful landlords.

"It would be a real tragedy and an avoidable tragedy for the Mamdani administration to pursue a strategy that is more of the same," Feingold said.

This new model of public housing, Feingold explains, would remove neglectful or big corporate landlords, and turn the buildings over to a streamlined public agency that has an elected tenant leadership. That way, tenants would still have control over their own living conditions and rents. This new agency, he said, would need to work with or even be a part of the New York City Housing Authority, so as not to create separate, unequal systems.

Until then, the tenants of 567 St. John's Place hope that the renovations will be completed soon, so they can finally reap the benefits of their victory in Housing Court three years ago.

"We invested so much in this building. If we walk away, we lose everything," one tenant said.

"The residents of 567 St. John's Place deserve better," De Leon wrote. "Real action, transparency, and a safe, livable environment, not another year of false promises and unfinished work."

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A TASTE OF AFFORDABILITY

ROAST CHICKEN + CHICKEN SOUP

6 HOURS TOTAL // **10** SERVINGS // **$3.82** PER SERVING

By John Morris

It's the season of giving so I'm providing you with a two-in-one foolproof recipe that requires minimal work and provides you with food for days. I've learned much of what I know about cooking from my mother, and this recipe is no exception. Every Sunday, my mother would roast a chicken, much to my chagrin. In my youth, I complained that it was "boring," failing to recognize the true magic at work. To roast a chicken is one of the most wonderful things a person can do, for themselves, for their family, for anyone or no one. It provides food for days, which makes it the perfect task for a Sunday as it leaves you with leftovers to eat all week.

This can be done all in one day if you get started early in the morning, but there's nothing wrong with splitting it into two days. I would recommend roasting the chicken and making the stock on the same day, and then you can strain and store the stock to make the soup anytime in the next few days.

While the steps of this recipe don't require much work, there's a lot of down time during the roasting, boiling and simmering of it all so this does take longer than most people have on a weeknight. But, if you have the time, I feel the comfort these two meals provide is well worth the wait.

INGREDIENTS

- **WHOLE CHICKEN** ~ *$15 (This will depend entirely on the size of your chicken. If you are able, get a chicken on the larger side to ensure there will be enough left for soup. Otherwise, use your conscience and pick the chicken that speaks to you.)*
- **CARROTS, ONE BUNCH** ~ *$3.00*
- **CELERY, ONE BUNCH** ~ *$2.00*
- **SPANISH ONIONS, THREE** ~ *$2.50*
- **GARLIC, TWO HEADS** ~ *$2.50*
- **LEMONS, THREE** ~ *$2.25*
- **ORANGE, ONE** ~ *$0.70*
- **PARSLEY, ONE BUNCH** ~ *$1.20*
- **BUTTER, TWO TABLESPOONS** ~ *$0.45*
- **OLIVE OIL, FOUR TABLESPOONS** ~ *$1.15*
- **WHITE WINE, ONE CUP** ~ *$3.00 (Obviously, the nicer the bottle of wine is, the more expensive it will be. There's really no need to break the bank on this one, just get something affordable that you don't mind using for cooking.)*
- **SEASONING PACKET, ONE** ~ *$2.00 (This is where your creativity really gets to shine. If you already have a seasoning mix or a collection of dried herbs and spices at home, I would recommend using those. Once again, use whatever speaks to you and remember that whatever you end up using on your chicken will eventually end up flavoring your soup as well.)*
- **EXTRA WIDE EGG NOODLES, ONE BAG** ~ *$2.50*

JOHN MORRIS

ROAST CHICKEN + STOCK DIRECTIONS

1. *Preheat your oven to 425 degrees.*
2. *Remove the skin from two of your onions, slice them thickly and place them on the bottom of a baking dish or cast-iron skillet large enough to fit your chicken without any overhang. Cut your heads of garlic in half and nestle them in with the onions. Drizzle with about a tablespoon of olive oil.*
3. *Remove the neck and giblets from inside the chicken. Locate the liver and remove from the packet of giblets, as it can add a somewhat bitter flavor to your stock. Save the rest for your stock.*
4. *Cut your orange and two of your lemons into large segments and shove inside your chicken. Place your chicken directly on top of your onions, rub some olive oil all over your chicken and dust with your spices/seasoning packet. Massage the seasoning into your chicken and then place in the oven for 30 minutes.*
5. *After 30 minutes, drop the heat to 350 degrees and roast for another hour or until the skin is golden brown and the internal temperature of the breasts reaches 165 degrees. Let your chicken rest for at least 20 minutes before carving. I would recommend saving your chicken breasts for soup, and the thighs, wings, drumsticks, and any other leftover meat can either be eaten right then and there for dinner or kept in the fridge for sandwiches, salads, or whatever else your heart desires. Regardless, remove as much meat as you can from the carcass, and remove the citrus from inside the chicken as well.*
6. *Save two carrots and two stalks of celery for your soup. Peel the rest of your carrots, wash the rest of your celery, and chop them into large chunks. Heat a couple tablespoons of olive oil in the bottom of a large pot and add your neck and giblets, cooking until they've browned and there's a lot of brown fond built up on the bottom of the pan. Add your chopped carrots and celery, as well as the onions and garlic from under the chicken, and stir to combine. Add your chicken carcass and enough water to cover everything. Bring to a boil and then lower heat and simmer for 3–4 hours, depending on your time constraints. In the last 30 or so minutes, toss in your bunch of parsley.*
7. *As it simmers, skim the top with a spoon to remove the foamy white impurities and fat that rise to the surface.*
8. *Once your stock has simmered for 3–4 hours, strain all of the solids from your stock and discard. Place your stock into quart containers and cool completely before putting in the fridge. As the stock cools, any unwanted fat will once again rise to the top of your container for you to easily remove with a spoon. Keep in the fridge until you're ready to make your soup.*

CHICKEN SOUP DIRECTIONS

Melt two tablespoons of butter in a large stock pot. Take your two leftover carrots, two leftover stalks of celery, and your leftover onion and dice them all into your personal soup-sized preference. Saute in the butter until slightly softened and fragrant.

Add your leftover cup of white wine to the pot and stir to combine, scraping the bottom to pick up any goodness left behind by your veggies. Cook for a couple of minutes and then add your stock. Bring to a boil and then simmer for about 10 minutes. Add your noodles and cook until tender, about 7 more minutes.

While the noodles cook, take your leftover chicken breasts and shred them with a fork or your hands into bite-sized strips. Once your noodles are done, add your chicken and the juice of your last lemon and stir until completely reheated. This shouldn't take longer than a minute.

To serve, ladle into bowls and top with any remaining parsley and some grated pecorino romano. If you have any crusty, warm bread just lying around, this would be an excellent time to use it.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

RICHARD SWAFFORD

Dear Reverend Billy,
Did you see the recent video footage of protesters on Canal Street who prevented ICE agents from leaving a parking garage to carry out raids against immigrants? I'd like to think I would be that courageous, but I'm not sure I have it in me. What about you?

— JAMES
Manhattan

Dear James,
"Will I be brave enough?" Don't ask that question first. Gently put all your possible answers to that question off to the side. Better to ask, "Is the New Yorker's freedom now being attacked by ICE, is it the same freedom as mine?" The answer is––Yes! She or he or they have the same freedom all of us have.

Trump's idea that we have freedoms of different qualities–this cannot exist. It is the fever dream of a convicted rapist and white surpremacist. Our bodies are violated by this criminal, and our bodies are defended by our freedom. We are shoving, shouting, screaming, pulling, stopping vans from moving––with our bodies, taking the hand of the victim when they are pulling her or his legs. Our bodies need our freedom and our bodies recognize it in the air of common space. Have your whistle ready. Your lawyer's number. But mostly, embody your freedom.

ICE is attacking all of us. In fact our freedom is a solid thing in the air. It is continuous and constant. We passionately re-enforce it throughout our life. Whereas ICE is erratic. They are sometimes violent. And then, we have seen where they are glad to have an excuse to back away from our unwavering conviction. Our freedom is solid in the air and our souls are immersed in it, nourished by it. We breathe our freedom. ICE guys have unclear directives, and our clarity and power is implacable. What they are doing must stop immediately.

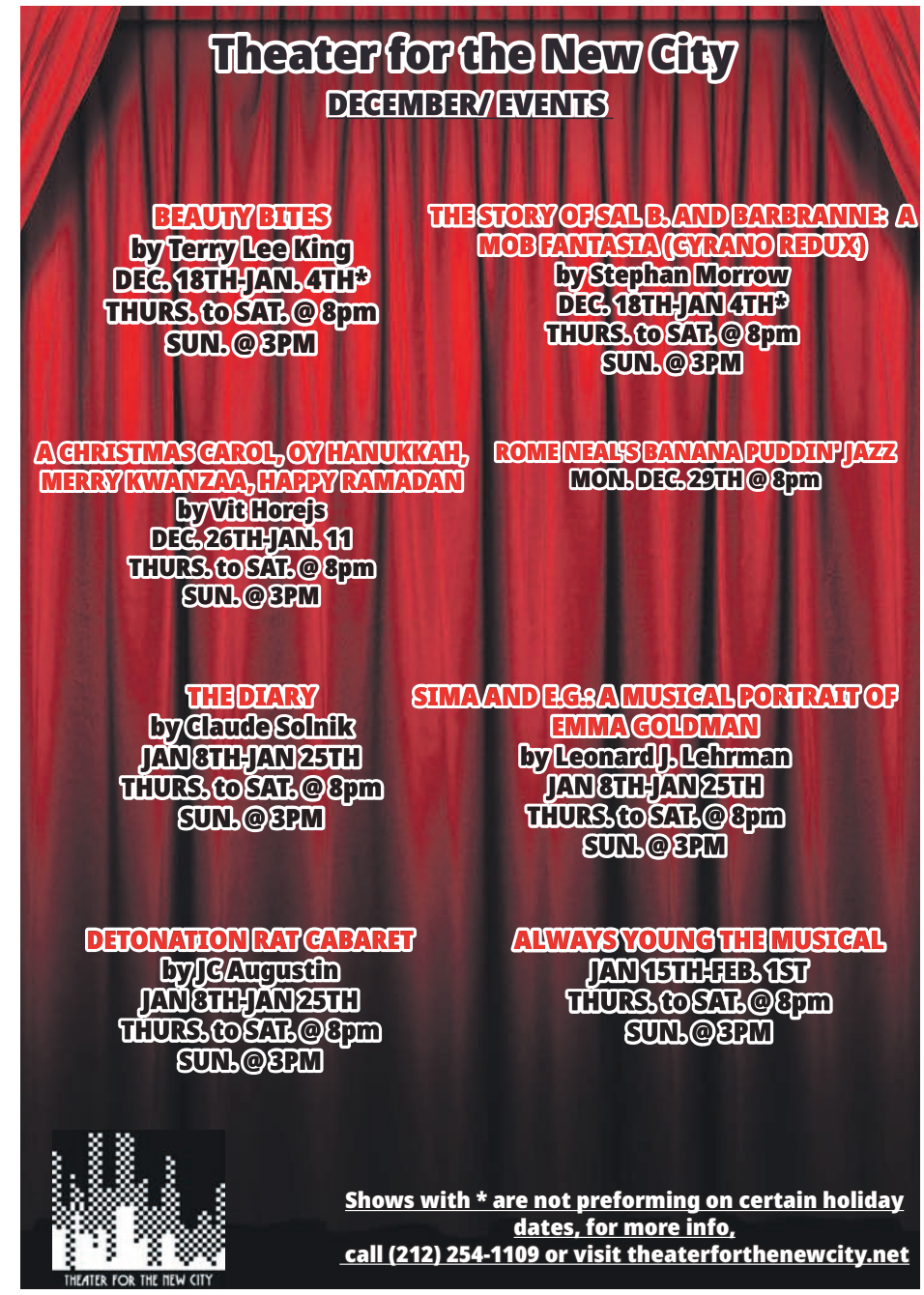
Our freedom is non-negotiable. We don't accept any stall or slow-down or dilution of our freedom to worship, to tape what is happening, to gather in groups without permits, and to free all people from illegal seizure. The First Amendment was ratified in 1791 and is immovable and irresistible.

When we act, we make it clear that the men behind the masks must return to their own freedom. They never had the freedom to attack the vulnerable among us. Their real freedom waits for them and they will recognize their real freedom because they have experienced how real our freedom is to us.

So James, let yourself respond to the attack. I think you will surprise yourself. Of course there are support roles that are so important, taping and whistling and writing down license plates and talking to journalists. But if you are swept off to jail, because that happens to all of us no matter how safe we think we are, you will carry your freedom in your body while you are there and your freedom will grow stronger and stronger.

Love-a-lujah!
BILLY

REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND?EMAIL REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.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